



Hernando Cortez

A Story of
The Spanish Conquest of Mexico.

BY R. M. BIRD.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

During the year after the landing of Cortez in Mexico, Amador de Leste, a young Spanish nobleman, arrives at Vera Cruz and learns that the Knight Calavar, of whom he is in search, is with Cortez. He makes his way to him in company with a stripling secretary, sent with him by Admiral Cavallero. In the cavalcade are a Moorish prisoner and his boy, Jacinto, whom Amador defends from an officer, Salvatierra. Arrived at the camp of Gen. Narvaez, Amador asks to be passed on to Cortez, nearly. Now, the triumphs of Cortez have fired with jealousy the heart of Velasquez, Governor of Cuba, who sent him to conquer Mexico. And Cortez and Narvaez, sent by Velasquez, are about to fight. Narvaez, enraged, throws Amador into prison, whence he is rescued by one of Narvaez's officers; Botello, a reputed magician attached to Cortez, escaping at the same time. They meet Cortez. Amador finds his kinsman, Calavar, afflicted with melancholy and forgetfulness. Cortez attacks and routs Narvaez, and goes to Tascala, a republican city in the midst of the Aztec empire. The army advances to Cholula, whose people are vassals to Mexico, and whose enemies are the Tlascalans. Ambassadors sent by Montezuma are rudely dismissed by Cortez. Calavar visits the pyramid, where he is struck down by the specter of a beautiful woman, murdered by him long years ago at Granada. Abdalla the Moor deserts to the Mexicans, while his son Jacinto remains with the unconscious Calavar. Don Amador becomes the protector of Jacinto. Cortez's army reaches the Aztec Capital after a perilous march, and is joyously welcomed by the Spanish garrison. Jacinto disappears after the Spanish army enters the city. Cortez insults Montezuma, and arouses the wrath of the populace. Don Amador, while searching Jacinto, is attracted by a tumult in the darkness, and cries for Christian men to arm and rescue Christians beset by infidels.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Draw thy sword, Lazaro, and follow!" cried the cavalier, "for these are other victims; and, with God's favor, we will rescue them!"

Thus exclaiming, and without a moment thinking of the unknown perils among which he was rushing, he ran rapidly in the direction of the cries, and straightway beheld, a little in advance of a great crowd of people, a group consisting of four or five persons, several of them women in strange attire, who stood shrieking with terror, while at their feet rolled three or four on the ground in close and murderous combat. The cries of one of these prostrate figures bespoke him a Spaniard, and while one sinewy pagan seemed to hold him upon the earth, another stood with his uplifted weapon, in the very act of dispatching him.

At this moment Don Amador rushed forwards, and shouting his war-cry, Dios, y buena esperanza! (that is, "God and good cheer!") struck the menacing savage a blow that sent him yelling away, and

seized upon the other by the shoulder to stab him; when, suddenly, the Spaniard rose to his feet with a leap that tumbled the infidel to the earth, and showed him to be already dead, cried aloud, in the well-remembered voice of the magician:

"Tetragrammaton! thou wert a good shield, though a bloody one, sir carcass!—Save the princess, and fly, or we are all dead men!—Arma! arma! to the rescue!"

Thus shouting, and seizing upon one of the women, while Don Amador snatched the arm of the other (for he perceived they were like to be cut off by the approaching crowd), the sorcerer, with his rescuers, ran towards the palace. His cries had reached the quarters; and presently they were surrounded by a hundred soldiers and cavaliers bearing lights, in the glare of which Don Amador had scarce time to note the countenance of his new ward, before she was locked in the arms of De Morla.

"Minnapotzin! Benita!" cried the joyous cavalier. "Amigo mio! thou hast saved my princess!"

"Stop not to prate and be happy; for the storm comes!" exclaimed Botello. "To the palace, all of ye! and to the cannon! for were you 500 men, there are wolves enow at your heels to devour you!"

Thus admonished, and perceiving, in fact, that a vast, though silent multitude was approaching, all were fain to fly, and in an instant they were crowding into the gates of the courtyard.

"This comes of insulting the king!" cried a voice from the melee, as Cortez, shouting out to clear the gates, was seen himself assisting to draw a piece of artillery to the opening.

"I see naught, I hear nothing," cried the General, affecting not to remark this reproach (which was indeed just; for it was this over-refinement of policy, spread with wonderful celerity throughout the city, which dashed the last scale from the eyes of the Mexicans, convinced them that their monarch was indeed a slave, and let loose the long-imprisoned current of fury). "I see naught, I hear naught; and my brave Rolands have been flying from shadows!"

"Say not so; the town is alive," cried the magician. "The hounds set on me, as I was bringing, at your excellency's command, these princesses from Tacuba; and it was only through the mercy of God, my good star, an Indian that I killed for a buckler, and the help of this true cavalier (whose fate, out of gratitude, I will reveal to him to-morrow), that we were not all killed by the way—for small reverence did the false traitors show to the maidens."

"Clear the way, then. Discharge me the piece, Catalan, true cannoner!" said Cortez, "and we will see what our foes look like so near to midnight."

The match was applied, the palace shook to the roar, and the blaze, illumining the street to a great distance, disclosed it, to the surprise of all, entirely deserted.

"I will aver upon mine oath," said Don Amador, "that the street was but now full of people; but where they have hid-

den, or whither they have fled, wholly passes my comprehension."

"Hidden, surely, in their beds," cried the General, loudly and cheerfully, for he perceived the crowds about him were panic-struck. "They set on Botello, doubtless, because they thought he was haling away the princesses with violence; and, convinced of their error, they have now gone to their rest,—a mark of wisdom in which I would advise all here to follow their example."

Thus cheered by their leader, the soldiers began to disperse; and Amador, musing painfully on the mysterious fate of the page, was accosted by Cortez, who, drawing him aside, said:

"It has been told me, senior, that your Moorish boy has made his escape."

"His escape!" echoed the novice, in surprise. "He did indeed vanish away from me, and I know not how, though much do I fear, in a manner that it shocks me to think on. I was about to ask of your excellency, as the boy is a true Christian, as well as a most faithful servant, for such counsel and assistance as might enable me, this night, to rescue him out of the hands of the cannibals; for it would be a sin on the souls of us all should we suffer him to come to harm."

"And are you so well persuaded of his faith, as to believe him incapable of treachery?" demanded Don Hernando, earnestly. "Thou forgettest, he has a father concealed among these infidels."

"Ayl! by my faith!" cried Amador, joyously; "I thought not of that before. And yet, and yet"—Here his countenance fell. "How should he be so mad, as to leave us in this strange and huge city, with any hope of discovering Abdalla?"

"I can resolve thee that," said Cortez; "for it is avouched to me by Yacub, that he saw this wretch (whom may heaven return to me for punishment, for he is a most subtle, daring, and dangerous traitor), this very knave Abdalla, at thy horse's heels; but he could not believe it was he, until made acquainted with the flight of the page."

"Ayl! now I see it," said Amador; "and I remember that he wept, as he held my hand, as if grieving to desert me. But, methinks, 't will be well to seek him out, and reclaim him. Will your excellency allow me the services of any score or two of men, who, for love or gold, may be induced to follow me in the search?"

"I will answer thee in thine own words," said Cortez. "Where wouldst thou look in this strange and huge city, with any hope of discovering him? Be content, senior; the boy is with the fox, his father. That should convince thee, he is in present safety. And, senior, I will tell thee, what I conceal from my people (for thou art a soldier, and, therefore, as discreet as fearless), that I would not, this night, dispatch a hundred men a mile from the palace, without looking to have half of them slain outright by the rebels that are around us!"

"And dost thou think," said Amador, "that these besotted, naked madmen, would dare to assail so many?"

"You will see, by my conscience!" cried the General with a grim and anxious smile. "Sleep with thine armor at thy side; and forget not thy buckler, for I have known a Tlascalcan arrow pierce through a good Biscayan gorget, and they say, the Mexicans can shoot as well. Let not any noise arouse thee, unless it be that of a trumpet. I would have thee sleep well, my friend; for I know not how soon I may need thy strong arm and encouraging countenance."

Thus darkly and imperfectly apprising the novice of his fears, (for now, indeed, a demon had roused a thousand apprehensions in his breast,) the General departed, and Don Amador disconsolately pursued his way to the chamber of the knight of Rhodes.

When Don Amador returned to the chamber, he was rejoiced to find his kinsman asleep, and not offended that the faithful Marco and Baltasar were both nodding, as they sat at his side. He threw himself softly on a cot of mats, covered with robes of fine cotton, over which was a little canopy,—such being the beds of the better orders of Mexico. The crowded state of the palace (for it is recorded that the number of Totonac and Tlascalcan allies, who remained in the garrison with Alvarado, now swelled the army of Cortez to nearly 9,000 men,) left him no other choice; and he felt that his presence was perhaps necessary in the unhappy condition of his knight. He was mindful to obey the counsels of Don Hernando, and lie with his weapons ready to be grasped at the first alarm; and he remembered also the hint that had been given him, not to be surprised at such tumults, when he heard a sound, continued throughout the greater part of the night, as of heavy instruments knocking against the courtyard wall, convincing him as well of the military vigilance and preparations, as of the fears of his General. In addition to this disturbance, he was often startled by moans and wild expressions, coming from the lips of the sleeping knight, showing him that even slumber brought no repose to his distempered spirit. But, above all, (and this made manifest the hold that the Moorish boy had got upon his affections,) he was troubled with thoughts of Jacinto; and often, as the angel of sleep began to flutter over his eyelids, she was driven away by some sudden and painfully intense conception of the great peril which must surround the friendless lad, now that the events of the evening proved him to be in the midst, and doubtless in the power, of an enraged multitude, to whom every stranger was an enemy. Often, too, as he was sinking into slumber, the first voice of dreams would cry to him in the tones of Jacinto, or the silent enchanter would bring before his eyes the spectacle of the boy, confined in the cage of victims or dragged away, by the hands of ferocious priests, to the place of sacrifice. These distractions kept him tossing about in great restlessness for a long time; and it was not until the sounds of the workmen in the yard were no longer heard, and until a deep silence pervaded the palace, that he was able to drown his torments in sleep.

He was roused from slumber by a painful dream, and fancying it must be now approaching the time of dawn, he stole softly to the bedside of Calavar, without disturbing the attendants. A taper of myrtle-wax, burning on a little pedestal hard by, disclosed to him the countenance of the knight, contracted with pain and flushed as if with fever, but still chained in repose. He stepped noiselessly away, and gathering his sword and a few pieces of armor in his hands, left the apartment.

From the door of the palace he could see, dimly,—for it was not yet morning,—that vast numbers of Tlascalans were lying asleep in the courtyard among the horses, while many sentinels were stalking about in silent watchfulness. He was now able, likewise, to understand the cause of the heavy knocking, which had annoyed him. The gates were closed, but in three rude embrasures, which had been broken in the wall by the workmen, frowned as many pieces of ordnance, commanding the street by which he had approached the palace.

Entering this again, and attracted by the distant murmur of voices, he discovered a staircase at the end of a passage, ascending which, he immediately found himself on the terraced roof of the building. And now he could perceive the exposed condition of the royal citadel, as

well as the preparations made to sustain it, in the event of a siege.

The palace, itself, extended over a great piece of ground, in the form of a square, the walled sides of which were continuous, but the center divided by rows of structures that crossed each other, into many little courts. The buildings were all low, consisting, indeed, of but one floor, except that, in the center, were several chambers on the roofs of others, that might be called turrets or observatories. The terraces were so covered with flowers and shrubs, that they seemed a garden. This mass of houses was surrounded on all sides by a spacious court, confined by

lery (with those who served them sleeping in cloaks hard by) looking with formidable preparation down the yawning and silent approaches.

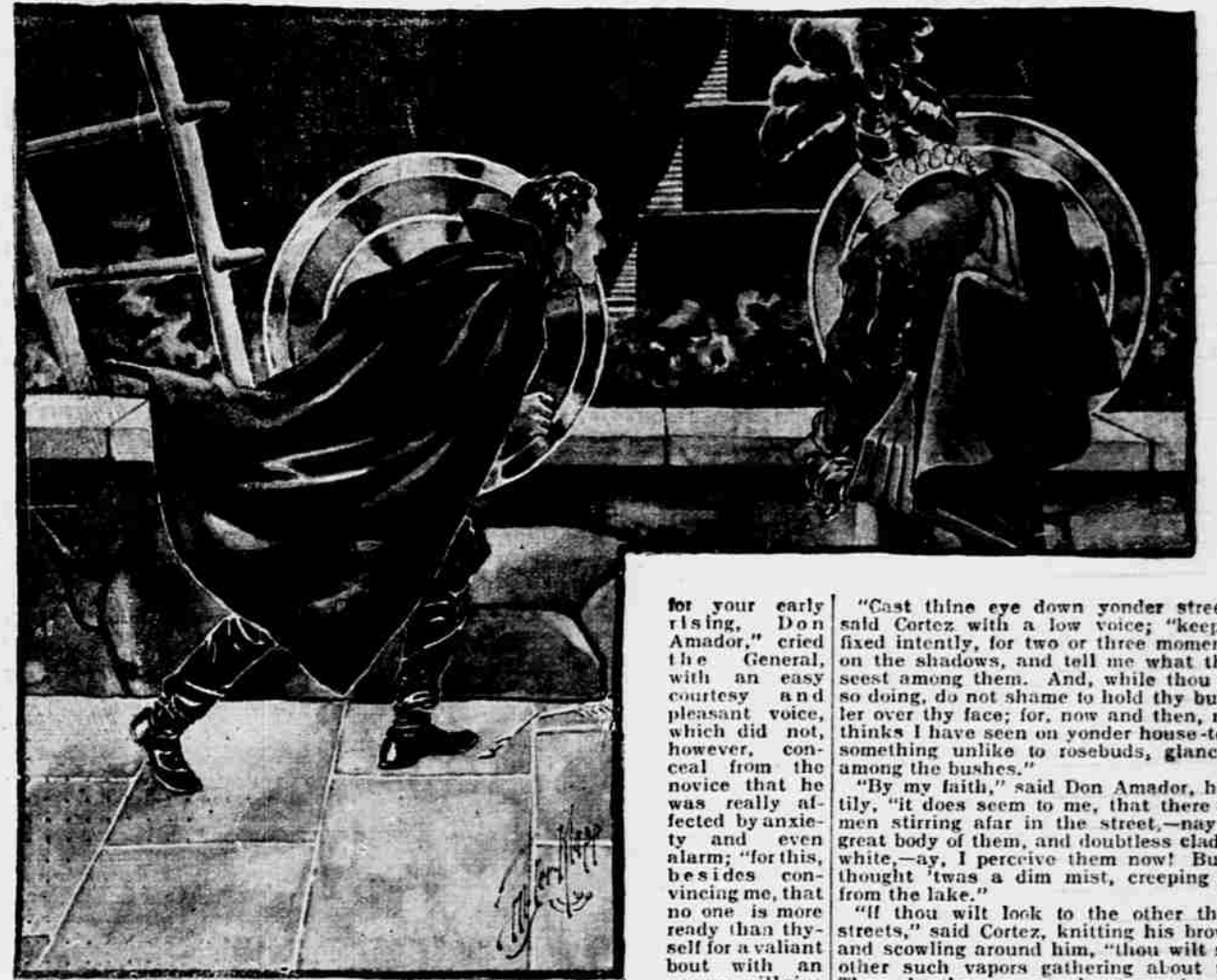
The neophyte had not yet given a moment to these observations, when he perceived on the top of one of the turrets a group of cavaliers who, being relieved against the only streak of dawn that tinged the eastern skies, were plainly seen, gesticulating with great earnestness, as if engaged in important debate. He approached this turret, and mounting the ladder that ascended it, was assisted to the roof by the hand of Cortez.

"I give you good cheer, and much praise

that now aids us, 'twill be but a boy's pastime to kill 10,000 of the bold lunatics each day before breakfast."

To this valiant speech, which was characteristic of Alvarado,—as notorious for boasting as for bravery,—Don Amador replied, complacently.

"To my mind, nothing could be stronger than this citadel against such enemies as we may have, especially since the placing of those cannon opposite to the great streets,—a precaution which should be commended. Nevertheless, noble cavaliers, it does not appear to me that we are in any immediate peril of assault: the infidels are not yet arisen."



for your early rising, Don Amador," cried the General, with an easy courtesy and pleasant voice, which did not, however, conceal from the novice that he was really affected by anxiety and even alarm; "for this, besides convincing me, that no one is more ready than thyself for a valiant bout with an enemy, will give thee an opportunity to note in what way these pagan Mexicans advance to assault, a matter of which I am myself ignorant, though assured by my friend Alvarado that nothing can be more warlike to look upon."

"HAH! DID I NOT WARN THEE WELL?" CRIED THE GENERAL.

a wall six or eight feet high, running entirely round the whole. The palace, with its outer court, did not yet occupy all of the great square upon which it stood. It was a short bow-shot from the battlements to the houses, which lined the four sides of the square. Opposite to each side or front of the fabric was a great street, along which the eye, in full daylight, could traverse, till arrested by the surrounding lake. Directly opposite, likewise, to each of these streets, as Don Amador soon discovered, the careful General had caused to be broken as many embrasures as he had seen on the quarter of the principal entrance; and, now, there were no less than 12 pieces of artil-

vance to assault, a matter of which I am myself ignorant, though assured by my friend Alvarado that nothing can be more warlike to look upon."

"I vow to God, and to Saint Peter, who cut off a knave's ear," said Don Pedro, "that there are no such besotted, mad, dare-devils in all the world beside, as you shall quickly see; and I swear to you, in addition, my friends, I did sometimes think, of a morning, the very devils that dwell in the pit were let loose upon me. But fear not: with my poor fivescore, and the 7,000 Indians, who should not be counted against more than 100 Christians, I felt no prick of dismay, except when I thought of starvation; and with the force

"Cast thine eye down yonder street!" said Cortez with a low voice; "keep it fixed intently, for two or three moments, on the shadows, and tell me what thou seest among them. And, while thou art so doing, do not shame to hold thy buckler over thy face; for, now and then, methinks I have seen on yonder house-tops something unlike to rosebuds, glancing among the bushes."

"By my faith," said Don Amador, hastily, "it does seem to me, that there are men stirring afar in the street,—nay, a great body of them, and doubtless clad in white,—ay, I perceive them now! But I thought 'twas a dim mist, creeping up from the lake."

"If thou wilt look to the other three streets," said Cortez, knitting his brows, and scowling around him, "thou wilt see other such vapors gathering about us. Thus do they surround stags, in the sierras of Salamanca! but sometimes the hunters have found more wolves than deer among their quarry; and, by my conscience, so will the dogs of Mexico find their prey, this day, when they come a-hunting against Castilians!—Hah! did I not warn thee well?" cried the General, as an arrow, shot from a distant terrace, and by some unseen hand, struck against the guarding-shield with such violence as to shiver its stone head into a thousand fragments. "Ware such Cupids; for, when they miss the heart, they are content to rattle among the ribs. What say ye now, my masters? The knaves are coming nearer! Such big rain-drops do not long fall one by one, but show how soon the flood will follow. Cover yourselves! for by my conscience, that was another, though it fell short. I see the house it comes from; and I will reward the messenger shortly with such a can-